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### *Social Work in the Twenty-first Century: Challenges and Opportunities.* John T. Pardeck and Francis K. O. Yuen.

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## Book Notes

John T. Pardeck and Francis K. O. Yuen, *Social Work in the Twenty-first Century: Challenges and Opportunities*. Westport, CT: Praegar, 2006. \$89.95 hardcover.

Social work is an evolving activity both in the practice and academic domains and it is not surprising, therefore, that diverse opinions about the profession's identity, preferred practice methods, research endeavors, educational standards and future goals should be expressed on a regular basis. Even though some social work academics find debates on these issues repetitive and tiresome, an ongoing discussion on these and the other important matters affecting the profession should be welcomed.

In this interesting book, the late Terry Pardeck and his colleague Francis Yuen make an important contribution to these debates. Yuen reports that Pardeck had been working on the book for some time before he became ill, and that he agreed to see the work to completion after Pardeck's death in 2004. Indeed, there is much in the book that reflects Pardeck's previous work on the major issues and challenges facing the profession.

The book is a relatively slim volume comprised of six chapters. Its primary message concerns the tendency among both social work educators and practitioners to draw on intuition, experience and the authority of teachers when applying knowledge to practice challenges. Of course, this is hardly a new complaint, but Pardeck and Yuen deal with it sensitively and reveal a willingness to be flexible and accommodate the insights of "non-scientific" approaches. For example, they pointed out that postmodernism's methodological relativism and focus on social construction and the experiences and

viewpoints of marginalized groups, such as people with disabilities, have value. On the other hand, Pardeck and Yuen are firmly committed to an evidence-based approach and the greater use of scientific evidence. Like many other scholars writing on the subject, they are highly critical of social work's lack of scientific rigor. This criticism is strongly expressed in the chapter dealing with professional social work education and the scholarly productivity of journal reviewers. The authors point out that many practice teachers do not have a doctoral degree and that the accreditation process places little emphasis on research and the use of verifiable knowledge in the curriculum. In addition, several leading social work journals are faulted for having editorial boards and reviewers who do not themselves engage in scholarly research.

The book is a welcome addition to the literature on the challenges facing social work today. In expressing their own views, the authors avoid a strident and one-sided approach. Nevertheless, they present their arguments in a firm and coherent way, revealing their commitment to developing a verifiable body of social work knowledge. Their attempt to find a compromise position which accommodates different perspectives is commendable. The book deserves to be widely consulted by anyone concerned with the issue of how social work can enhance its knowledge base and strengthen its role in both the academy and the world of practice.

Jo Ann Schneider, *Social Capital and Welfare Reform: Organizations, Congregations, and Community*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006. \$69.50 hardcover, \$29.50 papercover.

Proponents of social capital theory believe it can shed insight on everything from socializing (Robert Putnam's famous example of the "bowling alone" phenomenon), to educational outcomes (James Coleman's empirical studies of the effects of private and parochial versus public schools), to class advantage (in Pierre Bourdieu's study of French society). Jo Ann Schneider adds a new arena where social capital theory may have explanatory power: the efficacy of welfare reform